

South Dakota Disadvantaged Business Enterprise

Newsletter

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Effective Leadership Skills for Business Owners

Leadership is more than just a title, it's a skill. For business owners, effective leadership is the cornerstone of building resilient teams, fostering innovation, and navigating the complexities of the modern market. Whether you're managing a startup or steering a well-established company, the ability to lead well is essential for long term growth. In this article we will explore some key leadership skills every business owner should cultivate to inspire their team, drive performance, and create lasting success for their company.



Vision

As the head of your business, it's your responsibility to define its trajectory. This means that you need to know where you want the company to go, whether it be expanding into new markets, increasing revenue, or reaching a broader customer base, but the vision you need to develop should be more in depth than an end point. You also need to define the path your company needs to take to reach that goal, and how the team you're building supports that journey. If you want to enter new markets, your vision for your company should include the markets you want to access, what you have to offer new customers in those markets, and what the process for breaking into those markets will look like. This isn't easy, though, and you shouldn't expect to have that level of granularity already planned out when you begin your business. Rather, this is a skill that you will develop over time alongside your understanding of the market landscape, your business capabilities, and your own desires. As your knowledge and experience grow, so will your ability to forecast your trajectory and make accurate, attainable predictions that can guide your company's operations. It's important to make sure that this vision is being regularly examined and refined to make sure that it remains in line with what you want and what you can realistically achieve.

Communication

If you want your company to progress towards the vision you're developing, you need to be able to convince other people of the value of that vision and their role in it. That's where communication comes in. As a business owner, your ability to communicate is vital to leading a healthy team. You need to be able to give orders, provide direction, and deliver feedback to employees within your business as well as partners outside of it, and that requires an ability to deliver that information in a manner that is clear and positive so that it feels actionable. However, communication does not flow purely from you to others, and being able to listen is just as important

as being able to speak. Encouraging a culture of feedback and conversation and listening to what others have to say gives you access to new perspectives and can dramatically improve your business's capabilities.

Delegation

An often-undervalued skill in leaders is the ability to delegate work. Whether it be out of a sense of obligation to be doing the most work, the urge to micromanage every aspect of the business you've worked so hard developing, or something else entirely, it's easy to fall into a habit of taking on more than you can handle for the sake of your company, but that habit can hold your company back from reaching its highest value, and it can burn you out and make it harder for you to do the work you do need to do. As your business grows and you hire more people to help you run it, developing an understanding of which tasks you need to do and which are better handed off to someone else is a vital part of being an effective leader. Remember to account for not only your own workload and skill set, but those of your employees as well, so that you can identify who is best suited to each task while making sure that you aren't overloading individuals with too much work. When everyone is working at a sustainable level and doing the jobs that are best suited to their capabilities, your company will flow more smoothly and improve its profitability over time.



Conflict Management

No matter how smoothly your business runs, there will be moments of conflict. This is natural, normal, and can even be helpful to your company if it's handled properly. When conflict arises, it's important to minimize its effects on overall team cohesion by focusing on productive methods of resolution. To do this, remain impartial and try to discover the underlying causes of conflict so that you can address the problem at the root. Once you understand what's wrong, frame the conflict as an opportunity to grow and improve as a team whenever possible, and emphasize the importance of empathy and communication in resolution. If you find it difficult to lower tensions enough to reach the point of being able to employ these ideas, studying conflict mitigation techniques can be an important starting point.

Decisiveness

As a business owner, you are the ultimate decision maker for your company. Your business relies on your decision making for its success. For this reason, the ability to commit to a course of action is key. You must be able to, as the person with the clearest idea of the company vision, think strategically and make decisions to guide it towards that vision. This often means making decisions quickly amidst uncertainty, so part of learning to be decisive is learning to think quickly without rushing, to understand how much time you can afford to spend gathering information to inform your decision. An important aspect of decisiveness is being able to handle the results of those decisions in a positive way. Whether your choices result in positive or negative effects, you must be ready to review the choices, learn from the process you used to make them, and incorporate those lessons into the next decision you need to make.

This is far from an exhaustive list of skills business owners need, but it's a valuable set of basics that, when incorporated into your leadership, can create a solid foundation for future growth.

Announcements

Important Update on the USDOT Interim Final Rule (IFR) and South Dakota DBE Recertification

The South Dakota Department of Transportation (SDDOT) is moving forward with the implementation of the USDOT's Interim Final Rule (IFR), which requires all currently certified DBE firms to complete a full reevaluation under the new federal guidelines.

What's Happening Now

SDDOT is currently evaluating the responses received from the recent survey distributed to all in-state DBE firms to gauge each firm's interest in proceeding with the recertification process required under the IFR. Input that was received is helping SDDOT plan and allocate resources to ensure an efficient and timely reevaluation process.

Next Steps for Firms Interested in Recertification

SDDOT will soon begin outlining the process for accepting the required Personal Narratives and updated Personal Net Worth (PNW) statements from firms that have indicated interest in moving forward. These documents are key components of the new IFR requirements and must demonstrate social and/or economic disadvantage using factual, race/gender-neutral evidence.

To assist firms through this transition, Project Solutions Inc., the SDDOT DBE Supportive Services provider, will host a workshop focused on:

- Understanding the new requirements
- How to develop and write your Personal Narrative
- One-on-one support and guidance throughout the recertification process

Tentative workshop dates: January 14 and January 20, 2026 (subject to change).

Once the workshop dates are finalized, all DBEs will receive an email with confirmed details, registration information, and guidance for preparing your Personal Narrative.

DBEs are encouraged to attend the workshop before submitting their narrative to SDDOT.

Current Status of DBE Firms

Under the IFR requirements, all South Dakota DBE firms are temporarily listed as inactive until they complete the reevaluation process. All firms must complete recertification before SDDOT can restart the DBE Program.

What This Means for Statewide Goal Setting

Once SDDOT has reviewed and processed all recertification submissions, the department will resume work on DBE goal methodology and development which are a vital part of getting the DBE program started again.

SDDOT is committed to completing this recertification effort as quickly as practicable to comply with federal requirements while minimizing disruption for DBE firms.

An update to the FAQ on the IFR was released on December 1, 2025. You are highly encouraged to read the FAQ as it includes guidance on Personal Narratives: [IFR FAQ December 1, 2025](#).

If you have any questions regarding the IFR and the reevaluation process, please reach out to Kyle Watkins, SDDOT DBE Program Coordinator at 605.773.4906 or Kyle.Watkins@state.sd.us.

Upcoming Training & Events

Jan. 5 **SBA Funding Options and Resources for Small Businesses**
Webinar | Mon., January 5, 2026 | 12:00 P.M. CT | Cost: Free
[Learn More>](#)

Jan. 6 **Fund your Future: Get Your Business Loan-Ready!**
Webinar | Tues., January 6, 2026 | 4:00 P.M. CT | Cost: Free
[Learn More>](#)

Jan. 14 **Social Media Marketing: How Small Businesses Can Build Visibility & Trust Online**
Webinar | Wed., January 14, 2026 | 12:00 P.M. CT | Cost: Free
[Learn More>](#)

Time Management Hacks for Busy Entrepreneurs



Between managing business operations, meeting clients, developing growth opportunities, and innovating on the fly, entrepreneurs often find themselves stretched thin and overwhelmed by impossible demands on their time. In this article, we will look at practical time management strategies to help you make the most of your time while improving your business operations and your life. Whether you're a startup founder wearing multiple hats or a seasoned business owner looking to streamline your day, these strategies will help you work smarter and use your time more efficiently so that you can focus on what truly matters to you.

Start with a Time Audit

Before you can manage your time effectively, you need to understand where your time is being spent. A great way to get an understanding of your starting point is to perform a time audit. To do this, spend a week tracking your activities in 15-minute increments. There are software platforms that assist with this tracking, but a notepad and pencil are all you need if you prefer to keep things simple. As you go through your day every day for a week, write down everything you do every day, both in and out of work, and then examine the end results as you wrap up your week. This will give you invaluable insight into your actual schedule, which can vary wildly from the assumptions you make about the way your days play out. It might be easier to understand why you aren't accomplishing your primary tasks when you realize that you spend 20 minutes out of every hour checking emails, for example, or to see how your work-life balance has become skewed when your audit shows you leaving work at 6:45 instead of 5:00 most nights.



Time audits are very useful tools for developing an objective picture of your days, but there are a couple simple tricks you can employ to make them even stronger. First, make sure that whenever possible you are documenting your activities as they happen rather than in big batches during lunch or at the end of the day. Delaying data entry will make you more likely to forget details or give inaccurate information which will skew the results of the audit, so remind yourself to write what you're doing while it's happening, or as you wrap up each activity, to maximize clarity. Second, developing goals for each day and adding them to the notecards the night before will allow you to compare what you wanted to accomplish against what you actually did, which gives you a useful benchmark for progress and better insight into which activities are necessary, and which are distracting you from reaching your goals.

Prioritize Tasks

Something you will likely discover as you review your audit is that not all of your tasks are of equal importance. Some of the things you do each day are vital to your business's success, while others are less valuable, and some aren't valuable at all and simply waste your time. Once you have an inventory of the things you do on a regular basis, examine each one and determine their value to you. There are a variety of methods for rating the value of tasks, with common methodologies including the use of the Pareto Principle, which says that 80% of your results will come from 20% of your tasks and advises you prioritize that 20% aggressively, or the Eisenhower Matrix, which divides tasks into four categories of importance (urgent and important, urgent and not important, not important and urgent, and not urgent and not important) and suggests prioritizing the tasks that are both urgent and important. Find a methodology that works for your needs and rank your activities according to their importance. If you find tasks that aren't helping you reach your goals, or that are so minuscule in their effect that they don't justify the time spent accomplishing them, you can begin saving time right away by cutting them out of your schedule entirely.

Don't Forget to Delegate

As you review your tasks, remember that being the owner of a business doesn't mean you have to do all the work. There will probably be work that doesn't suit your skill set or seem worth your time but is valuable for your business nonetheless. These are tasks that should be delegated, either by assigning them to other employees or outsourcing them. For some tasks, like basic customer service or data indexing, you can use automated services or AI to remove the need for human involvement entirely. As you develop your business, hire people you can trust to handle the jobs you can't so that you can focus your time on the tasks you do best while delegating the rest.



Create a Time Blocked Calendar

A common problem entrepreneurs run into when attempting to optimize their time is reactivity. If you don't have a schedule for the day, it's far too easy to get swept up in the flow of work and become trapped in a cycle of reacting to whatever emergency presents itself, working hours you didn't mean to on tasks you didn't intend to prioritize, only to end the day without feeling like you really accomplished anything. To escape this trap, avoid being overly reactive by designing your day ahead of time through a time blocked calendar. Devote the end of each day to planning your next one, making sure to include scheduled times to do tasks that distract you from your core work like answering emails or making phone calls, time for deep and uninterrupted work, time to do things other than work, and time that's unscheduled to prepare for emergencies or to give yourself a chance to think ahead. This way, you can start each day knowing what you need to get done and measure your progress throughout the day to keep yourself on track. Doing this scheduling in 30-minute chunks allows you to implement the highly effective Pomodoro Technique, which advocates for working on one task for 25 minutes before taking a 5-minute break, repeating that cycle 4 times, and then taking a longer break before resetting. These small breaks improve focus and increase energy, which will let you get more done overall. Having a schedule doesn't mean you can't adapt, though. Don't be afraid to make changes if an emergency arises, just do your best to create a routine that lets you take control of your time and meet your goals consistently.